

Appl. No. 10/695,958  
In re ALLMANDINGER et al.  
Reply to Office Action of Sep. 6, 2005

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

Claim 1 (currently amended): A drive axle assembly for a motor vehicle, said axle assembly comprising:

a support beam member having a substantially flat central plate section;

a differential assembly module secured to said flat central plate section of said support beam member;

a pair of axle shaft members outwardly extending from said differential assembly member module; and

a cover member fastened to said flat central plate section of said support beam member to cover at least a portion said differential assembly module, said cover member having at least one access opening therein for receiving one of said axle shaft members therethrough;

said at least one access opening in said cover member provided with an adjustable sealing flange device to seal an interior cavity within said cover member between said at least one access opening and one of said axle shaft members extending therethrough;

said adjustable sealing flange device being adjustable relative to said cover member.

Claim 2 (previously presented): The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 1, wherein each of said axle shaft members has a first central axis of rotation and said sealing flange device has a second central axis; and wherein said adjustable sealing flange device is adjustable relative to said cover member to align said second central axis of said sealing flange device to said first central axis of one of said axle shaft members.

Claim 3 (previously presented): The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 1, wherein said cover member has a plurality of holes adjacent to said at least one access opening, and said sealing flange device includes a corresponding plurality of mounting holes, said drive axle assembly further includes a plurality of fasteners adapted to extend through said holes in said cover member and said mounting holes in said sealing flange device for fastening said sealing flange device to said cover member.

Claim 4 (original): The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 3, wherein said mounting holes in said sealing flange device are substantially larger in diameter than said holes in said cover member allowing free movement of said sealing flange device about said fasteners in order to enable positional adjustment of said sealing flange device relative to said cover member.

Claim 5 (original): The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 4, wherein said sealing flange device includes a housing supporting a seal member, said seal member sealingly engages one of said axle shaft members.

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Claim 6 (original): The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 5, wherein said mounting holes in said sealing flange device are formed in said housing of said sealing flange device.

Claim 7 (canceled)

Claim 8 (previously presented): The drive axle assembly for a motor vehicle as defined in claim 1, wherein said cover member is a rear cover secured to a rear mounting surface of said flat central plate section of said support beam member.

Claim 9 (previously presented): The drive axle assembly for a motor vehicle as defined in claim 1, further including a front cover secured to a front mounting surface of said flat central plate section of said support beam member.

Claim 10-17 (canceled)

Claim 18 (previously presented): The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 1, wherein said cover member has two coaxially spaced access openings therein for receiving said axle shaft members therethrough; and wherein each of said access openings is provided with said adjustable sealing flange device to seal said interior cavity within said cover member between one of said access openings and corresponding one of said axle shaft members extending therethrough.

Claim 19 (canceled)

Claim 20 (currently amended): A drive axle assembly for a motor vehicle, said axle assembly comprising:

a support beam member having a substantially flat central plate section;

a differential assembly module secured to said flat central plate section of said support beam member;

a pair of axle shaft members outwardly extending from said differential assembly member module; and

a cover member fastened to said flat central plate section of said support beam member to cover at least a portion said differential assembly module, said cover member has two coaxially spaced access openings therein for receiving said axle shaft members therethrough;

each of said access openings is provided with an adjustable sealing flange device to seal an interior cavity within said cover member between one of said access openings and corresponding one of said axle shaft members extending therethrough;

said adjustable sealing flange device being adjustable relative to said cover member.

Claim 21 (previously presented): The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 20, wherein each of said axle shaft members has a first central axis of rotation and said sealing flange device has a second central axis; and wherein said adjustable sealing flange device is adjustable relative to said cover member to align said second central axis of said sealing flange device to said first central axis of one of said axle shaft members.

Claim 22 (previously presented): The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 20, wherein said cover member has a plurality of holes adjacent to said at least one access opening, and said sealing flange device includes a corresponding plurality of mounting holes, said drive axle assembly further includes a plurality of fasteners adapted to extend through said holes in said cover member and said mounting holes in said sealing flange device for fastening said sealing flange device to said cover member.

Claim 23 (previously presented): The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 22, wherein said mounting holes in said sealing flange device are substantially larger in diameter than said holes in said cover member allowing free movement of said sealing flange device about said fasteners in order to enable positional adjustment of said sealing flange device relative to said cover member.

Claim 24 (previously presented): The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 23, wherein said sealing flange device includes a housing supporting a seal member, said seal member sealingly engages one of said axle shaft members.

Claim 25 (previously presented): The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 24, wherein said mounting holes in said sealing flange device are formed in said housing of said sealing flange device.

Claim 26 (canceled)

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Claim 27 (currently amended): The drive axle assembly for a motor vehicle as defined in claim [[26]] 20, wherein said cover member is a rear cover secured to a rear mounting surface of said flat central plate section of said support beam member.

Claim 28 (currently amended): The drive axle assembly for a motor vehicle as defined in claim [[26]] 27, further including a front cover secured to a front mounting surface of said flat central plate section of said support beam member.

Claim 29 (currently amended): A drive axle assembly for a motor vehicle, said axle assembly comprising:

a support beam member;

a differential assembly module including a differential carrier member secured to said support beam member, said carrier member rotatably supporting a differential case of said differential assembly module;

a pair of axle shaft members outwardly extending from said differential assembly member module; and

a cover member fastened to said support beam member to cover at least a portion said differential assembly module, said cover member having at least one access opening therein for receiving one of said axle shaft members therethrough;

said at least one access opening in said cover member provided with an adjustable sealing flange device to seal an interior cavity within said cover member between said at least one access opening and one of said axle shaft members extending therethrough;

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said adjustable sealing flange device being adjustable relative to said cover member.

Claim 30 (previously presented): The drive axle assembly for the motor vehicle as defined in claim 29, wherein said differential carrier member and said cover member are mounted to a flat central plate section of said support beam member.